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White Attention Economy in *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Combining cognitive stylistics, cognitive narratology, and critical race theory, the paper establishes the concept of a 'white attention economy' as a tool for analysing systemic discrimination inscribed in (real world) attention patterns and its reflection in literary fiction. Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) works with such a 'white attention economy', that is, selective narrative attention privileging a white perspective, which exploits and reinforces readers' habitual attention patterns. Most strikingly, the novel's character descriptions present white characters as default. However, the novel also breaks with key principles of a white attention economy and thus challenges it, encouraging readers to reflect upon their own attention patterns. This is mainly achieved through two different joint attention frames: (1) the representation of joint attention between characters, which (2) readers are invited to join cognitively.

1. Introduction

Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) has often been considered a milestone of literary fiction that addresses racism and racial injustices in America and remains one of the most popular and canonical novels in the US today (PBS 2018). However, recent approaches from critical race theory have shown that the novel deploys a narrative strategy of white privilege (Pryal 2010; Shaw-Thornburg 2010; Tanner 2019). White privilege can generally be defined as "the myriad of social advantages, benefits, and courtesies that come with being a member of the dominant race" (Delgado / Stefancic 2012, 87) or a societal matrix that "allocates rights and resources differentially to groups on the basis of race" (Omi / Winant 2014, 57) and thereby privileges white people over people of colour. White privilege as a narrative strategy refers to the strategic allocation of narrative attention and cognitive complexity which privileges white characters, perspectives, and storylines. In this article, I will explore the interaction of narrative attention allocation that privileges white characters and perspectives in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and readers' cognitive processes while reading, which contribute to what I have termed a 'white attention economy'.

The novel portrays its heroes Scout, Jem, and Atticus as non-racist and 'colour-blind' (Champion 1999). There are two notions of colour-blindness in racial structures that have informed interpretations of colour-blindness in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Attention plays a crucial role for both. The first notion frames colour-blindness, that is, the metaphorical inability to see the social construct of race, as the kind of 'attention economy' where racial discrimination would be abolished (cf. ibid.). The second, opposing, notion of colour-blindness, which I follow, exposes the first one as an expression of white privilege and argues that

it is rather intentional blindness towards or deliberate denial of racial discrimination by white people that underlies the idea of colour-blindness (Bonilla-Silva 2017; Lee Jayne 1995; McIntosh 2002; Tanner 2019). While the first notion backgrounds racial differences, the second draws attention to them. *To Kill a Mockingbird* displays modes of backgrounding white privilege which, as I will illustrate in the following sections, can be analysed through specific attention mechanisms. Building upon both critical race theory in literature and cognitive literary studies, and using *To Kill a Mockingbird* as an example, I will show how narratives establish a 'white attention economy' (see Section 2), on the one hand privileging whiteness in the fictional world, while simultaneously offering moments for the critical reflection of the 'white attention economy' on the other hand.

To analyse how the novel establishes a 'white attention economy', I will first outline the ways in which aspects of white privilege shape character construction by comparing the characterisation of white characters and characters of colour (Section 3). As will be shown, *To Kill a Mockingbird* relies on readers' implicit racial biases when constructing a character; more specifically, the narrative activates readers' presupposed whiteness for the construction of the fictional characters. While previous research in cognitive literary studies concerned with character construction analysed the interaction of textual stimuli and prior knowledge more abstractly (Culpeper 2002), I will explore implicit bias in character construction through a step-by-step analysis that builds on predictive processing, a theory of cognition that centres on preconscious expectations. In Section 4, I will then examine two types of joint attention that challenge the white attention economy and will identify the literary devices that support these types. Founded in the domains of philosophy and cognitive science, joint attention describes recognised shared attention to an object or topic between at least two people. As I will show, it is also a crucial device for revealing the white attention economy in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Connecting to critical race studies which highlight the role and ubiquity of the white gaze especially in literary imagination (Morrison 1992), I will analyse a key scene in *To Kill a Mockingbird* that performs, exposes, and problematises key principles of the white attention economy, focusing on the white gaze and markers of 'otherness' that draw the attention of both characters within the story world and readers. As I will show, specific attention-grabbing literary devices are used to prompt readers to reflect upon (and counter) key mechanisms of the white attention economy.

2. White Attention Economy – A Definition

In narratives, a white attention economy can be defined as selective attention which privileges a white perspective. Such an attention economy is established, on the one hand, through elements that a narrator keeps implicit or makes explicit (narratorial attention) and, on the other hand, through elements that

characters ignore or realise (character attention). Narratorial and character attention both serve to direct readers' attention, building on and influencing readers' expectations about the story world and its characters.

With this definition, I deliberately diverge from previous conceptualisations of 'attention economy', which regard it not as a textual but contextual phenomenon. The term 'attention economy' stems from debates on digitisation in which Herbert A. Simon coined the term in 1971; it initially referred to enterprises, websites, posts, etc. which compete for readers', users', and consumers' limited attention capacity (Goldhaber 1997; Davenport / Beck 2001; Lanham 2006; Carr 2011; Bueno 2017). My understanding of the term, however, connects to strategies of what Sibylle Baumbach has referred to as "attention management" (2019a, 43), i.e. strategies that guide readers' attention in the course of a narrative and are used to direct their attention to and from specific phenomena that are central to the story world to unfold. Calling this 'management' of readerly attention 'attention economy', however, (a) emphasises the fact that, also in connection with narrative texts, readers' attention is a limited resource that needs to be strategically allocated to support a specific story world; (b) foregrounds the observation that readers' attention is shaped by dominant attention economies they are embedded in; and (c) highlights the impact of invisible structures that produce white privilege on our attentional habits. Highlighting these invisible structures relates to the need for a 'cultural narratology of attention' (Baumbach 2019b), which takes into account such tacit assumptions by a dominant culture that often shape the reception of literary texts. In this respect, 'attention management' takes place within an 'attention economy' that defines the rules by which attention is allocated, i.e. managed. A 'white attention economy' constitutes the broader narratological structure that transports and/or reflects upon social and cultural racial structures which privilege whiteness.

To further conceptualise 'white attention economy' and use it for the analysis of textual phenomena, I draw on narratological concepts such as the 'principle of minimal departure'. This interpretative rule, which connects to the 'reality principle' (Walton 1990), was proposed by Marie-Laure Ryan following David Lewis' (1978) application of possible worlds theory to unmentioned but imaginable elements of a story world. The principle of minimal departure claims that:

> [r]eaders imagine fictional worlds as the closest possible to AW [the 'actual' or 'real' world], and they only make changes that are mandated by the text. For instance, if a fiction mentions a winged horse, readers will imagine a creature that looks like real world horses in every respect except for the fact that this creature has wings. (Ryan 2013, paragraph 6)

Therefore, a literary text does not need to inform its readers about every detail of the fictional world, e.g. that the laws of physics apply, nor, with regard to scripts and schemas (Snowden 2022, 481), explain the routines of everyday interactions that occur in the narrative. Instead, readers will initially assume that the story world is just like the 'real' world, thereby of course activating their knowledge of a story's historical context. Narrators can hence be economical

with the information they provide (i.e. bring to the readers' attention), which constitutes a reader-oriented attention economy.

Texts deploy a *white* attention economy when a character's whiteness is such an untold fact and is assumed to be the default race by both the narrator and the target audience. Readers' imagination of the default race in a narrative is also influenced by context factors such as the author's or their own race. Textually, narratorial and character attention to racial attributes significantly shape readers' hypotheses about a character's race. In a white attention economy, narrators are economical with racial attributes of white characters in that these are hardly mentioned or not mentioned at all. This is the case, for instance, if the narrative assumes white characters as the default, frames characters of colour as 'the Other', and performs a white gaze.

As becomes apparent, the term 'white attention economy' relies on other well-established concepts such as white privilege, white gaze, and racial bias, which guide attention distribution: they determine what is seen by whom and how. In a narrative, these mechanisms of racially determined attention allocation can unfold as well. The narrative featuring white attention economy then relies on the (often preconscious) complicity of readers – requiring readers to effortlessly fill in the gaps without questioning whiteness as the default mode in this activity.

In order to analyse the mechanisms of a white attention economy, this article draws on approaches from both narratology and cognitive studies. It aims to offer insights into the interaction of readers and narratives in construing specific perceptions of race. Together, production conventions, text phenomena, and interpretation strategies help establish a 'white attention economy'. As cognitive narratology argues in regard to cognitive theory of prediction, these interpretation strategies for literary texts are preconscious, as are the hypotheses that more generally inform readers' perceptions (Hohwy 2013). A closer analysis of this interrelation enables a deeper understanding of how texts convey, maintain, and possibly destabilise racial structures. *To Kill a Mockingbird* will serve as an example to illustrate key aspects of the white attention economy and its reflection in narratives since it is concerned with structures of racial injustice from a white narrator's perspective. The following analysis addresses several questions that relate to cognitive narratology: How do narratives encode white privilege, and how does the representation of implied white privilege together with readers' predictive processing set a standard white character? And to what extent can literary texts unveil key mechanisms of a white attention economy, such as the white gaze, by using cognitively engaging attention patterns?

3. Characterisation and Predictive Processing

Most cognitive theories foreground the incoming sensory-perceptory information as the main constituent of human sense-making. We perceive something

and then try to understand what it is. Predictive processing flips this perspective. It highlights that we never perceive everything that we could perceive and that strong hypotheses about what we are likely to find in a particular environment or how people are going to behave prefigure what kind of information will be processed. Only very strong attention-grabbing stimuli can create 'prediction errors' that challenge these hypotheses that drive the human mind's predictive processing. When reading fiction, predictive processing shapes readers' sense-making of the text as they constantly form hypotheses (or: predictions) about the story world. As Karin Kukkonen (2020, 2) points out, readers' predictive processing does not happen consciously: "'Predictions' refer here to the presuppositions about what things are probably like rather than any verbalised proposition. While we might reflect on some of these predictions, they remain usually pre-conscious and inform every aspect of the reading process."

Readers' predictions concern every aspect of a narrative, including characters, their features, or future actions. In this article, I will show how narratives prompt readers to hypothesise about a character's race which is especially relevant in *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s display of racial conflicts in the Southern US in the 1930s. From a first-person perspective, adult Jean Louise 'Scout' Finch narrates her growing up in the fictional small-town Maycomb and recalls how she perceived a trial in which her father Atticus is the appointed defence attorney for a black man, Tom Robinson, who allegedly raped a white woman. Before Atticus is assigned to defend Tom, Scout does not address racial conflicts. Her childhood and family life with Atticus, her brother Jem, and their black housekeeper Calpurnia seems, aside from the effects of the Great Depression, mostly idyllic. However, this first part of the novel in which most characters and the setting are introduced is structured by the narrative's underlying white attention economy that perpetuates readers' implicit racial bias and presupposed whiteness.

Before the trial, readers encounter several characters from Scout's neighbourhood, whom she describes briefly but pointedly. Mrs Dubose, for example, is introduced via Scout's opinion of her: "Mrs Dubose was plain hell" (Lee 1960, 7). Scout first mentions her neighbour Maudie Atkinson by noting her relationship to her teacher (ibid., 18) and describes her ancestor Simon Finch in the brief family history recap at the beginning of the novel as an apothecary from Cornwall (ibid., 3). Readers might wonder how Mrs Dubose's nastiness is expressed or how Simon Finch settled in Maycomb. However, they probably do not wonder about a character's race, or more specifically, about their whiteness. Instead, they presuppose[1] it. All these characters are read as white, but they are not explicitly characterised as such, because whiteness is seen as the norm by the white narrator Scout. In this section, I investigate in detail how readers' predictive processing capacities, triggered by specific narrative features, help establish whiteness as the norm. As I argue, racial structures and presuppositions could underlie even narratives that, like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, claim to portray non-racist characters like Scout, her brother Jem, and her father Atticus.

Why are readers likely to perceive the three characters mentioned above as white although it is not explicitly stated? This is both text- and context-driven.

Readers are most likely to expect white characters when they read a white author's text who, due to the historical reception setting, mainly addresses white readers. Especially at the time of the novel's publication, it was a (narrative) convention that (a) stories about a character's life in a 1930s Southern small-town are set in a white community that looks, if at all, from the outside at communities of colour and (b) protagonists are mostly white and characters of colour rarely receive narrative depth (context). Following the principle of minimal departure, readers might preconsciously predict that the story world is just like what they know about the novel's context, i.e. the 'real' world in which *To Kill a Mockingbird* is situated. Presenting white characters without explicitly referring to their whiteness as shown in the three examples above then reinforces readers' presupposed assumptions about whiteness as tacit 'norm' and constitutes the narrative's white attention economy (text).

Guided by context and previous reading experiences, as well as based on narratives that rely on such forms of unspoken whiteness, both white readers and readers of colour situate the hypothesis 'A character is white' within a new narrative. In our case, they do not first read the character descriptions of Mrs Dubose, Maudie Atkinson, and Simon Finch, and then infer from their context knowledge that these characters must be white, due to their social status or classificatory proper names that indicate someone's regional origin,[2] for instance. As Kukkonen (2020, 18) points out, readers do not account for all textual cues before making sense of a narrative. Rather, they immediately apply their hypotheses, pre-formed on social and cultural knowledge, to a character, a future event, etc. Thus, white is the presupposed race in the text that "never has to speak its name" (Lipsitz 1995, 369), it is the default hypothesis that readers of the novel assume fits these characters.

But how exactly do pre-supposed whiteness and predictive processing interact? When reading a narrative, readers make assumptions about a character's race and their hypothesis shapes their further perception of the narrative because it appears to have the highest probability[3] based on personal background beliefs and subjective estimates (Hohwy 2013). Some hypotheses have a higher 'prior probability' which has been acquired during the readers' (literary) socialisation; readers who grew up in a white-dominated culture assign a higher probability to a character being white because the majority of fictional characters are white. Texts can choose to challenge prior probabilities, and force readers to reattribute relative probabilities to different hypotheses. *To Kill a Mockingbird*, however, privileges whiteness in the narrative, which makes 'The character is white' the hypothesis with the highest 'interior' likelihood, prior probability, and hence the highest probability in total, suggesting itself to readers while reading. When Scout introduces a new character, readers preconsciously hypothesise about their race and infer them to be white (cf. Kukkonen 2020).

Scout's method of characterising people maps out certain regularities of the novel's overall "probability design" (ibid.). In other words, reader's preconscious inferences rank the total probability for a character to be white much higher than for them to be a character of colour. A novel's probability design, as introduced

by Karin Kukkonen as a model for analysing how narratives inform readers' predictions about the narrative, can be summed up as "a set of hypotheses about what is likely to happen" (ibid., 16) that the narrative implies from the very beginning. Kukkonen (ibid.) also relates probability designs to characters since probability designs contain hypotheses about characters' features and actions. Characterising people through their social status and not mentioning whiteness like Scout does, establishes whiteness as readers' default hypothesis for the narrative. The readers can expect that Scout will tell them if this is not the case to help them minimise prediction errors.

This, of course, can only work because Scout is a reliable narrator. Although the adult Scout as the 'narrating self' sometimes comments on the naivety of the 'experiencing self' (i.e. herself as a six- to nine-year-old child), these comments do not refer to the presentation of a character's race. It is only in *Go Set a Watchman* (2015), *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s previously written sequel, that the adult narrator Scout realises to what extent her perception of race and hence her narratorial presentation of it has been enabled by her white privilege (Tanner 2019). In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Scout is still deeply entrenched in a narratorial white attention economy.

While the figural narrative situation cues readers to add to and correct the interpretations of the experiencing child Scout, the readers' prediction that a newly introduced character is white remains preconscious (but can be made conscious, see Section 4). Moreover, the reader quickly learns in *To Kill a Mockingbird* that whenever a character is not white, the narrator Scout will tell them. Mrs Dubose, again, is a good example to illustrate this: "Mrs Dubose lived alone except for a Negro girl in constant attendance, two doors up the street from us in a house with steep front steps and a dog-trot hall" (Lee 1960, 114). Scout marks Mrs Dubose's domestic help as the black 'Other' but does not give explicit information on Mrs Dubose's race as her whiteness is already presupposed and, on top of that, made clear *ex negativo*. The same mechanism applies when Scout tells Miss Maudie the rumours about Boo Radley and Miss Maudie comments on their origin: "That is three-fourth coloured folks and one-fourth Stephanie Crawford" (ibid., 50). Also, Calpurnia and Tom Robinson, the only characters of colour to get narrative attention, are explicitly characterised as black. Tom Robinson is introduced as the black man that Atticus represents in a rape trial even before his name is revealed (ibid., 82). Scout, Atticus, and Calpurnia herself regularly comment on her race, she has "more education than most coloured folks" (ibid., 27), and "she's never indulged them the way most coloured nurses do" (ibid., 151).[4] There is no need for the reader to suppose that a character is black because for them race is always explicitly determined. The text prohibits that readers hypothesise 'A character is black', ascribe a considerable likelihood to this hypothesis and ever test it. Although this presupposed whiteness might not be intentional, *To Kill a Mockingbird* still relies on the reader's implicit racial bias, that is, the high prior probability for characters to be white if race is not indicated, in order to make sense of the narrative. Neither the narrator Scout nor the implicit white reader are aware of this mechanism since predictive processing

works preconsciously. As long as the narrative does not provide any striking prediction errors that challenge whiteness as default, the latter continues to apply.

Another mechanism of the white attention economy comes into play here: As characters of colour are, by narrative convention, often minor characters, readers do not expect them to be multifaceted and round. For minor characters of colour, the narrative marginalisation of minor and non-white characters overlaps and readers, so to speak, doubly presuppose they are flat non-complex characters. Not only the description of characters but also modes of characterisation support the white attention economy that rests on readers' presuppositions. This becomes clearer when combining readers' predictive processing and their use of Theory of Mind on different character types.

In cognitive science, Theory of Mind describes the capacity to ascribe mental states to others and to interpret and predict other people's actions based on these mental states. Children acquire this ability around the age of three to four and can thus, among other things, pass false-belief tasks. One common false-belief task to test one's Theory of Mind ability shows a boy who leaves a bar of chocolate on a shelf and then leaves the room, after that his mother enters the room and puts the chocolate in the fridge. If the child tested in this false-belief task understands that the boy, upon returning, falsely believes that the chocolate is still on the shelf, it has successfully exercised Theory of Mind (Mitchell 2011).

When reading fiction, readers also exercise Theory of Mind on characters, i.e. they interpret their beliefs and desires, depending on a character's narrative depth. In her analysis of distraction and hyper-focus in *Pride and Prejudice*, Natalie Phillips (2011) points out that minor characters who receive fewer descriptions do not offer enough information to fully interpret and predict their actions, based on readers' Theory of Mind abilities. Instead, readers tend to exercise Theory of Mind only on complex-minded characters (ibid., 107–108). As Scout does not distribute her narrative attention equally between white characters and characters of colour, the latter seldomly become cognitively engaging 'readable minds' (ibid.).[5] In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, there is no character of colour except for Calpurnia who has enough narrative depth to activate the reader's Theory of Mind. This again fosters the reader's presuppositions about white characters and characters of colour: whites are interesting, round, multifaceted characters, characters of colour barely matter, remain flat and dull, and are impossible to 'read' and 'comprehend'.[6] This is because Scout neither looks at nor offers any information about individual characters of colour (except for Calpurnia and Tom). Characters of colour primarily appear in groups and remain anonymous: Scout describes them merely as "coloured folks" (Lee 1960, i.e. 50, 138, 177, 249) or, during the trial, as "black people in the balcony" and even dehumanises them as "coloured balcony" (i.e. ibid., 181, 208, 228, 237). Consequentially, readers cannot exercise Theory of Mind on characters of colour, as they are deindividualised, even objectified, which is a key mechanism of a white attention economy.[7] The narrative's ways of character construction discussed in this section guide and reinforce readers' prediction that a character is most likely to be white thus

constructing a white attention economy that is both upheld by the narrative and its readers.

4. Seeing the Unseen: Reflecting upon Attention Patterns

Whiteness in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is 'unseen' in two ways: It is literally unseen as the readers do not see the word 'white' as referring to a character's race on the novel's pages,[8] and it is diegetically unseen as Scout is oblivious to her and her neighbours' whiteness. I want to emphasise that whiteness is 'unseen' instead of 'invisible' because it *is* highly visible in the story world of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.[9] It is precisely this discrepancy between the obvious visibility of whiteness that underlies the story world and its legibility, i.e. the lack of the term 'white' in the narrative, from which the white narrative attention economy emerges. In this regard, Tanner (2019) called Scout's self-proclaimed colour-blindness a strategy of white privilege. Her and other characters' whiteness is, of course, visible but she does not 'see' it, that is, she assumes it is not an important category and sets it as the norm for a character. In contrast, the race of characters of colour is always seen, both by Scout and thus also by the readers. However, there are moments in which whiteness and the novel's white attention economy may become visible to the readers due to specific attention-grabbing devices.

Further, making the narratorial white attention economy visible enables readers to reflect on the novel's second-order probability design. Probability design, the set of hypotheses about likely and unlikely events and qualities of the story world that a novel provides from the very beginning (Kukkonen 2020), operates on three levels:

> The first-order probability design plays out at the level of plot and concerns itself with events that revise the predictions of readers (and characters). […] The second-order probability design modulates the reliability (or 'precision') of prediction errors through the style, focalisation, and other linguistic features of the literary text. The third-order probability design involves expectations about precisions, namely, a judgement of probability that arises from implicit and explicit intertextual connections that is often developed throughout the course of a narrative. (Ibid., 4–5)

A white attention economy (and narratorial attention direction in general) is therefore situated in the second-order probability design, the level of precision, that is, how confident readers are in their hypotheses (not even realising that you assume 'white character' as default suggests a very high probability and precision for it is implied in the narrative). The three levels make probability designs also analytically more flexible than most accounts of scripts and schemas in narratology (ibid., 131). *To Kill a Mockingbird* does not break a schema (i.e. 'people with a high social status in the US in the 1930s are white') when making the narrator's white attention economy and readers' complicity in it seen. Rather, as exemplified by the scene that I will analyse in more detail in this section, the narrative can draw readers' attention toward their preconscious assumptions about the probability and precision of their hypotheses. *To Kill a Mockingbird* achieves this

by depicting and engaging readers in 'joint attention frames' that foreground the narratorial white attention economy while using strong visual means of focalisation. All these are attention-guiding mechanisms modulating the reliability or precision of inferences.

It is no coincidence that research often investigates the principles of predictive processing using examples of divergent visual input (Hohwy et al. 2008; Denison et al. 2011; Hohwy 2013). Visuality, the visual design of a text, or references to non-verbal communication in literature are relevant for multiple cognitive mechanisms: Gaze works as a means to establish joint attention (Lively 2016); deictic signs have been regarded as the origin of human communication and complex grammar (Tomasello 2008); text fragmentation increases readers' attention (Emmott et al. 2006); and empirical literary studies even measure readers' attention through eye-tracking to investigate the role of spatial design of texts for comprehension tasks (Rayner et al. 2006). Hence, outlining how a literary text employs different forms of visuality offers insight into its attention patterns, which guide readers' engagement in a narrative. The scene in which their black housekeeper Calpurnia takes Jem and Scout to her black community's church and by that unwillingly upsets one member of the black congregation features a variety of stylistic devices and graphical elements that construct a strong sense of visuality in the narrative and indicate two types of joint attention that help expose the white attention economy upheld by the narrative and its readers.

The church scene in *To Kill a Mockingbird* portrays how Scout's and Jem's whiteness becomes centre to the characters' attention, a phenomenon that is known as joint attention. Joint attention describes the triadic relation between two or more people (e.g. in a conversation) and an object that they attend to, and the participants must recognise that the attention is shared (Tomasello 2000). Between these (at least) three cornerstones, participants 1 and 2 and the object they jointly attend to, a joint attention frame is established "within which communication may take place" (Tobin 2008, 25). As further explained by Tobin: "[t]his frame is defined through the participants' shared understanding of the goal-directed activities in which they are jointly engaged" (ibid.). With regard to literary texts, Tobin claims:

> literature is in an important sense made out of scenes of joint attention, both in practice (the activities of the many real people involved in producing, reading, distributing, and responding to texts) and in representation (the activities of literary characters and the encoding and manipulation of viewpoint in narration). To the extent that this is so, literature is bound by the rules and mechanisms of joint attention and, by extension, of social cognition—including biases in the system. (Ibid., 4–5)

Tobin's account of literary joint attention also provides a theoretical framework that assists the analysis of readers' interaction with representations of joint attention in a narrative as it combines literary discourse (i.e. narratorial attention that readers may join) and story (i.e. joint character attention). As joint attention is often related to shared seeing (Tomasello 2000; Tobin 2008), it helps to embed a narrative's visual stylistic devices and focalisation techniques in a broader

context of social cognition. This is crucial for understanding why and how the church scene in *To Kill a Mockingbird* prompts readers to reflect on their complicity with or contribution to the narrator's white attention economy.

Two frames of joint attention emerge in the church scene that built upon each other. First, there is a joint attention frame between characters (character attention) which readers are, by narratorial attention direction, invited to join and thereby help constitute a second, 'overlapping' joint attention frame. Layered frames of joint attention are central to complex models of readers' cognition in cognitive narratology. Merja Polvinen (2013, 167), for instance, "suggest[s] a model where engagement with fiction is seen in terms of multiple and simultaneous layers of attention in readers." In the following, I will analyse each type of joint attention in this scene and examine how they are intertwined.

4.1. Joint Attention I: Character Attention

The first type, following Tobin's (2008, 71) classification of literary joint attention, is a representation of joint attention between characters. The congregation, Lula, Calpurnia, Scout, and Jem look at and thus direct the focus onto Scout's and Jem's whiteness and problematise it. Interestingly, Calpurnia's and the children's outing to the church begins with a statement that will be challenged in the following scene. When Calpurnia and Jem pick out the right tie for his suit, Scout claims "Jem's colour-blind" (Lee 1960, 130). This has often been read in tandem with the family's attitude towards the community of colour in Maycomb, portraying them as entirely non-racist characters who do not discriminate against people of colour and therefore do not even 'see' skin colours (Champion 1999). The following confrontation in the church, however, is a rhetorical fight between the white Scout and a woman of colour, Lula, who racially determine each other, thus opposing the assumption that Scout and her family are 'colour-blind'.

When Scout, Jem, and Calpurnia enter First Purchase Church, they become an object of joint attention: The dynamic setting, with people stepping back, parting, and making a pathway for them (Lee 1960, 131), makes Scout, Jem, and Calpurnia the centre of attention in the scene. Notably, the term 'attention' itself is mentioned, whereby attention is conceived not as an act of joint attention to the 'Other', but as an act of acknowledgement: "[…] the women crossed their arms at their waists, weekday gestures of respectful attention" (ibid.). At first, everything seems fine, but shortly after their arrival, Scout and Jem are confronted with the different world and attention economy of a community of colour: A mysterious and threatening voice stops the three characters, disrupts, and re-focuses the previous attention on Scout, Jem, and Calpurnia in two ways. The woman that stops them, Lula, says "What you up to, Miss Cal?" (ibid.) and her black code first marks a clear linguistic break between Scout's familiar 'white world' and the black church she has entered. Second, Lula defies Scout's white

narrative gaze and instead returns her gaze onto her, making Scout's and Jem's whiteness an object of joint attention in the story world.

The black code of Lula's first words "'What you up to, Miss Cal?'" (ibid.) seems strange to Scout and, as they interrupt the otherwise 'white' language, maybe also to readers. When Calpurnia answers in the same black code, Scout is disconcerted (and so might be readers) as she has "never heard her use" this tone (ibid.). Calpurnia's code-switching has been interpreted as a linguistic marker of her liminality and in-betweenness between the white world of the Finch household and her personal life in a community of colour (Hess 1996) and works as an attention marker from a cognitive literary perspective. Scout's (and the readers') attention is drawn towards Calpurnia's previously unnoticed language variety, even more, when Scout expresses her alienation: "Again I thought her voice strange: she was talking like the rest of them" (Lee 1960, 131), and later reflects her oblivion: "That Calpurnia led a modest double life never dawned on me. The idea that she had a separate existence outside our household was a novel one, to say nothing of her having command of two languages" (ibid., 139).[10] Readers are encouraged to do so, too. This is probably the first-time readers are made aware that the code of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is not a universal language (although 'white' standard English is the norm for Anglo-American literary fiction and a lingua franca) but the southern variant of standard, that is white, American English (Hess 1996, 9). Lula's and Calpurnia's code-switching thus destabilises the novel's white attention economy by challenging its conventions and exposing its contingency.

Lula also challenges Scout's white narrative perspective. This argument unfolds in two parts: firstly, how Scout's white perspective in this scene is constructed by focalisation and graphic stylistic devices, and secondly, how Lula tries to defy this white perspective. When Lula approaches Scout, Jem, and Calpurnia from behind, the narrator Scout shifts to the focalisation of Scout, Jem, and Calpurnia and makes readers see the scene through their eyes. Their joint attention to Scout's and Jem's whiteness is modelled by graphic stylistic devices whose impact on capturing and directing readers' attention has been studied in cognitive stylistics. Scout, Jem, and Calpurnia "stopped and looked around" (Lee 1960, 131), and what they saw is presented to readers seemingly unfiltered behind a colon. This specific combination, the word 'stop' and a colon, that signifies the threshold between two actions or new sensory input, works as an attention magnet. 'Stop' indicates a change of events where the readers' attention is refocused. The colon cuts the sentence in half and hence functions as a means of fragmentation that increases readers' attention. More specifically and speaking in terms of Emmott et al. (2006), in this example, the colon (and the text that follows it) is used to simulate Scout's visual input and to reinforce the white perspective of the narrator.

What readers 'see' next is a textbook example of the white gaze on a black body (cf. Yancy 2008). Scout constructs Lula's body as a dangerous object, using war vocabulary and distinct markers of 'Otherness'. Lula seems seven feet high, is "bullet-headed with strange almond-shaped eyes […] and an Indian-bow

mouth" (Lee 1960, 131). The colon ("we stopped and looked around:" ibid.) suggests that it is followed by Scout's unfiltered visual input and thereby veils that it is a white narrator gazing at a black body. The novel's narrative situation and time structure make this even clearer: Since there is a time gap of several years between Scout's 'experiencing self' (who 'sees' the situation in the church) and her adult 'narrating self' (who tells what she 'saw' in the church), it is logically and narratologically impossible for the colon to present the experiencing Scout's direct visual input. Instead, Scout's 'narrating self' paints a mental picture of the situation directed by her white gaze. Then, Lula exposes Scout and Jem as "white chillun" (ibid.), the switched black code highlights the racial difference between them and directs the readers' attention to this first (and only) moment in which readers *see* Scout's and Jem's whiteness by adopting Lula's perspective. Lula defies Scout's white gaze, breaking her unchallenged white narrative by identifying it as such. First, Scout tried to make Lula an object of her, Jem's, and Calpurnia's joint attention ("*we* stopped and looked around" ibid., my highlight), which Lula then turns around, directing the congregation's joint attention to Scout's and Jem's whiteness, offering a joint attention frame between characters for readers to join cognitively. Readers are thus prompted to reflect upon Scout's white point of view and white gaze, when Lula repeats: "'You ain't got no business bringin' white chillun here […]'" (ibid.).

4.2. Joint Attention II: Narratorial Attention

The description of Scout's movements ("we stopped and looked around:" ibid., 131) showcases the primary experiential link between intersubjectivity and shared seeing and utilises it to involve readers in this scene based on the second type of joint attention. While Tobin (2008, 71) does not include this type in her classification of literary joint attention, I find it useful to distinguish the mere representation of joint attention and readers' participation in this represented scene of joint attention. Two literary strategies are deployed here to make readers engage cognitively in the joint attention frame between the characters: (1) increasingly attracting readers' attention in the course of the scene and (2) narratively putting them into the narrator's shoes. Both strategies contribute to exposing *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s white attention economy by enabling readers to realise its underlying mechanisms and reflect upon Scout's tacit assumptions.

Only extremely attentive readers will notice markers of the white gaze and the white attention economy. In the scene in First Purchase Church, some elements serve to increase readers' attention: besides code-switching, the short paragraphs of direct speech help capture readers' attention (cf. Emmott et al. 2006). The word 'stop' appears three times during the confrontation and suggests an interruption of a current action that affects readers and characters alike. Together, these elements slow down the reading pace, correlating with the time-stretching narrative pace of the episode. The decreased pace and the intensity of

attention markers enable readers to realise that Scout never commented on her own race, never explicitly positioned herself in the racial structures in Maycomb, and instead presupposed her own and other characters' whiteness.

The strong visual means of focalisation and gaze that I have discussed for the first type of joint attention (character attention) are also relevant for the second type of joint attention (narratorial attention). Readers are drawn into the scene and cognitively take Scout's position; they look at the story world through her eyes and by that join her position in the characters' joint attention frame. Scout narratively directs readers' attention *through* her white gaze and thereby draws their attention *toward* her white narrative gaze. Consequently, readers do not only read about a joint attention frame between Scout, Jem, Calpurnia, and the congregation, they actively engage in it. Joint attention itself is highly attention-grabbing for its participants and bystanders, e.g. when you see people intentionally looking out the window, you will probably want to join them and see what they are looking at. Thus, reading about joint attention between characters already triggers readers' attention to the attended object, Scout's and Jem's whiteness, and to mentally join the characters' discussion about it. Since Scout additionally puts the readers narratively in her shoes, readers may feel looked at just like her. *To Kill a Mockingbird* "use[s] joint attention to invite the reader into a character's consciousness" (Tobin 2008, 195). This entails a major consequence for white readers: Like Scout and Jem, their whiteness is seen and called out. For the first time in the novel, the gaze is returned onto the narrator, onto the 'I' and thus ultimately also scrutinises white readers, making their whiteness 'the Other', naming it and making it seen for the first time. At this point, white readers, alerted by the attentional structures of the narrative, are prompted to realise that, up to this point, they have been part of (and narratively benefitted from) a white attention economy.

5. Conclusion

When reading fiction, many character features go unnoticed. For instance, Madame Bovary's frequent change of eye colour[11] does not draw many readers' attention. In contrast to such features, which are overtly legible but do not seem important, there are racial features that can be narratively veiled due to a white attention economy. As I have argued above, the readers' presupposed whiteness and the writing method that can be summed up as 'veiling whiteness, exposing blackness', ensure that readers will tend to adopt a white perspective. While readers bring their presupposed whiteness to the text (the hypothesis they try on various characters), narratives, particularly by the use of specific modes of characterisation, often enable them to subscribe to the white attention economy in which they are embedded in. As a result, a standard white character elicits and reinforces readers' implicit racial bias, steering their predictive processing. Empirical research, for example along the lines of the Celebrity Guessing Game

(Hegarty 2017), is further required that investigates how readers mentally picture characters, their race, and other features, and how these mental images are prompted by specific devices, which could complement previous research in cognitive stylistics.

Besides reinforcing racial prejudice, narratives can also destabilise readers' white attention economy by making them aware of its underlying mechanisms and thus inviting them to reflect upon the (preconscious) biases it creates. This is most effectively achieved through combining multiple joint attention frames that use highly attention-grabbing narrative elements and structures such as a focus on gaze and gaze direction, code-switching, or fragmented typography like colons, to name only a few stylistic devices that prompt the critical reflection of attention patterns in the church scene. As previously shown, this particular scene portrays the congregation's joint attention to Scout's and Jem's whiteness and actively engages readers in this joint attention frame by strong visual means of focalisation. These different types and frames of joint attention are genuinely connected to and build upon each other, unfolding their full potential in combination, thus exposing the white attention economy that underlies this narrative. They prompt us to make unseen whiteness seen, expose Scout's narrative white gaze, and foreground the complicity between readers and text, between readers' implicit racial bias and white characterisation methods that are at the heart of character construction in this narrative.[12]

Though this article focused on *To Kill a Mockingbird* to illustrate key mechanisms of the white attention economy that drives the narrative and its deconstruction, investigating key mechanisms of a white attention economy would be a fruitful and necessary approach to other literary texts, especially as it connects to key concerns at the intersection of cognitive narratology and critical race studies. In addition to offering new ways for analysing the creation and function of stereotypes and preconscious biases prompted by literary texts, such an approach could also strengthen the value of fiction in educational contexts, as it suggests that specific devices help raise awareness for preconscious biases and offers strategies to counter them. Moreover, the link between reading fiction and readers' biases is not only relevant for reflecting on practices of reading but also for challenging stereotypes in real life. As suggested by Culpeper (2002, 256), we use the same set of hypotheses and cognitive mechanisms for fictional characters and real people: "It is difficult to deny that what we do when we read texts […] containing characters is to attempt to *interpret* those characters with the structures and processes which we use to interpret our real-life experiences of people". Just as reading might improve Theory of Mind (Kidd / Castano 2013; Nünning 2017), it might additionally help either increase or decrease readers' biases and presuppositions depending on how much a narrative is built on a white attention economy and how much it draws readers' attention to this fact. Hence, insights from analysing white attention economies in literary fiction can be used to develop writing methods to unveil them and thus may help to reduce racial biases, presupposed whiteness, and white privilege in fiction.

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[1] I follow Stalnaker (2002, 701) in his definition of presupposition as the speaker's assessment of common ground: "To presuppose something is to take it for granted, or at least to act as if one takes it for granted, as background information – as common ground among the participants in the conversation."
[2] Their social status clearly indicates that these characters must be white. Mrs Dubose has inherited her husband's fortune and lives alone. If she was a woman of colour, she could never have married wealthy Henry Dubose. Miss Maudie is a widow too and lives in the same decent neighbourhood as the Finchs, who stem from Simon Finch, the British immigrant; Atticus and his brother are college-educated and pursue prestigious professions. None of them could be in their respective social position if they were not white, which is evident to both historical and contemporary readers.
[3] The notion of probability implied in predictive processing reaches back to the philosophical and mathematical accounts of probability in the 17th and 18th century: "Probability, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was a mode of thinking, reasoning, and judging, as well as a branch of mathematics […]. On the mathematical side, accounts emerged that saw probability as a measure of frequency (how likely are you to draw a black marble from an urn that has the same amount of black and white marbles?) and as a measure of confidence (given that you have drawn four black marbles, how likely is it that the next marble will be black as well?). The notion of probability as a measure of confidence is formalised in Bayes's theorem in the late eighteenth century […], and this is the cornerstone of today's predictive processing." (Kukkonen 2020, 6)
[4] Moreover, this is a strategy of 'whitening' Calpurnia. By narratively separating her from "most coloured folks", the 'other' "coloured folks", as she is more educated (hence, more 'white'), Scout and Atticus display the colonialist strategy of transforming the 'civilised' Other into the Self (Rieder 2008, 76–77). They suggest that Calpurnia is a good nurse *although* she is phenotypically black because she is not like "most coloured nurses" on the inside (Lee 1969, 151). Arguably, Calpurnia's characterisation works slightly differently than for 'the other' black characters. As suggested by the examples above, she is characterised by negation. As suggested by Nahajec (2014, 124), characterisation by negation and the evoked "absent actions and attributes" "activate[…] pre-existing expectations or project[…] expectations about characters." Thus, characterising Calpurnia first and foremost as different from most people of colour reinforces readers' racial bias and stereotypical thinking.
[5] Within the story world logic, this might be due to the fact that she, as a child, is unable to put herself into the shoes of characters of colour because she was raised in a white environment governed by a white attention economy.

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[6] I would also argue that characters of colour do not even receive cognitively engaging narrative depth when they play a key role in events of racial injustice. Tom Robinson, for instance, remains a flat character although he is the defendant in the rape trial that makes up the bulk of the novel's second part. One would assume that the trial is an opportunity to narratively unfold his character, but this does not happen. *To Kill a Mockingbird* instead serves the white saviour narrative (Borsheim-Black 2015, 418–419).

[7] In her *Washington Post* piece, Errin Haines (2020) describes the unequal narrative attention given to white characters and characters of colour: "But the story is one by a white author, told through primarily white characters. Re-reading the book, I was struck that Lee offers rich profiles of the story's white characters, their personalities, mannerisms, dress, histories, but there are no such character studies to be found for any of the African Americans in this story. Their humanity is obscured from us, suggesting that it is of little consequence to the author, reader, or the whites in Maycomb. White privilege means not actually having to know black or brown people, to live among them but to never really see them, even in one's own house."

[8] For example, the word 'white', in the sense of skin colour, appears only 46 times in *To Kill a Mockingbird* whereas the several words for characters of colour, 'black', 'coloured people', or else, appear a total of 148 times.

[9] Similarly, in Visual Culture Studies, Martin A. Berger (2005, 2) locates "the power and ubiquity of race in conditioning the meaning of American visual culture" in the 'unseen'. "Unseen discourses circulating in society play a significant role in determining how an artwork gets seen [and] it is imperative to visualize the discourses these artworks fail to depict" (ibid., 23).

[10] Much more could be said about Calpurnia as a transgressor and mediator between the two spheres of whites and people of colour. Suffice to say that readers are now encouraged, as Scout becomes aware of her previous oblivion (or intentional blindness?) of Calpurnia's "double life", to picture Calpurnia in other situations outside the Finch household in productive mind-wandering. Smallwood and Andrews-Hanna (2013) summarise the creative and identity-forming benefits of mind-wandering which might be triggered by bringing Calpurnia's position as a go-between to readers' attention and prompting the latter and to 'complete' her identity in their minds.

[11] As Evans (1975, 275–276) summarises, "[t]he progression of the change of Emma's eyes is as follows: (1) Brown, when first mentioned, (2) Dark, (3) Large, (4) Black in shadow, (5) Blue in daylight, (6) Black for the remainder of the novel, during her adulterous period, and (7) Blue when the color is last mentioned."

[12] Finally, another way of pointing out attention patterns in characterisation is through cognitive reorganisation that forces prediction errors. Culpeper calls this "dramatic recategorization" (2001, 96–99).